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DE RUEHLB #0630/01 1581816
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 071816Z JUN 09 ZDK DUE CLAIM OF NON-RECEIPT
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5060
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3369
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3881
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000630

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S BRIMMER
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT
DOD/OSD FOR FLOURNOY/KAHL/DALTON
DRL/NESA FOR WHITMAN
OVP FOR HMUSTAFA
PARIS FOR WALLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/07/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: HIGH TURNOUT; POLLS CLOSE AND THE WAITING
BEGINS

REF: BEIRUT 629

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Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) Polls for the June 7 parliamentary elections closed at 1900 and vote-counting commenced. Voter turnout was quite high. The Interior Ministry estimated that turnout reached 52 percent, 20 percent higher than the turnout in the last parliamentary elections in 2005. Voters complained of long lines and slow processing at the polling stations. Interior Minister Ziad Baroud announced that he would receive official results from the Higher Registration Committees in each of the 26 regions sometime after midnight, and that he could release official results right away, as they came in by district.

¶2. (SBU) NDI observers reported fairly regular voting processes. Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun, as well as some Embassy contacts, cited forged identification cards, vote-buying, a shortage of election officials, among other violations. The Lebanese Armed Forces successfully contained minor, sporadic clashes between party supporters. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood visited ten polling stations and met President Sleiman (septel). End summary.

HIGHER VOTER TURNOUT
COMPARED TO 2005

¶3. (SBU) Voting crowds were heavy during the late morning and early afternoon. Voters have complained of long lines at several polling stations, with some would-be voters leaving without casting their vote. Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun, after casting his vote in Baabda, criticized what he deemed were slow procedures at the polling station, saying it was "not worthy of the voters."

¶4. (SBU) Voters in Akkar, in the north and Zahrani, in the south complained of long lines, slow processing, missing

names on registries, and mismatches between voter rosters and identity cards. An Embassy locally engaged employee reported that some Shia voters in Beirut III were surprised to find their names were not on the lists. Although Interior Minister Ziad Baroud had authorized people whose names were not on the lists to vote if they were able to provide valid identification, the heads of the polling centers claimed they had not been told this, and did not let the Shia voters vote, we heard.

15. (SBU) Local embassy employees reported at midday the crowds remained calm; however, NDI observers noted increasing tension and frustration among voters, with long waits and disorganization later in the afternoon.

16. (SBU) The Interior Ministry announced midday that registrars at polling stations could allow three voters at a time to enter polling centers, rather than the two previously allowed, in an effort to speed the process. Baroud said he would not extend voting hours nationally, but the individual polling centers' registrars could choose to extend the hours.

17. (SBU) Turnout had slowed by 1500, prompting Baroud to call on people who had not yet voted to head to the polls. By one hour before polls were scheduled to close, voter turnout reached 57 percent in Sidon, 55 percent in Zghata, and 50 percent in Keserwan. After the polls closed, Baroud said that preliminary results indicated the Christian district of Keserwan had the highest turnout at 70 percent, and the nation-wide turnout was 52 percent. By comparison, voter turnout was approximately 43 to 45 percent in the 2005 parliamentary elections.

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18. (C) NowLebanon reported more buses carrying dual Lebanese-Syrian nationals entered Lebanon (reftel), this time from the northern border crossings.

RESULTS WILL BE ANNOUNCED
DURING THE NIGHT

19. (SBU) Baroud stated publicly that he could announce elections results as early as midnight Sunday/Monday or early Monday morning. A contact at UNSCOL relayed Baroud's conversation with UNSCOL Michael Williams during which he said he planned to announce official results district by district, as soon as he received the reports from the Higher Registration Committees for each of the 26 districts. Embassy contacts said they did not expect results until noon on Monday.

CLAIMS OF VOTER BUYING,
OTHER ELECTION VIOLATIONS

110. (SBU) An embassy contact reported that party members were passing out voting lists in front of polling stations in Tripoli, in contravention of election regulations, while in Sidon, some candidate supporters reportedly tried to enter polling stations illegally to campaign inside. Several individuals have been arresting on charges of forging identification cards. A municipality leader in Sidon was arrested for allegedly distributing gasoline coupons to voters.

111. (SBU) Baroud denied that any forged identification cards were successfully used and called the overall security plan a "success." NDI reported that only two officials were present in the vast majority of polling stations, instead of the three workers stipulated by law.

112. (SBU) For the most part, NDI observers reported fairly regular voting processes, including the use of transparent

ballot boxes, sealed envelopes, and permanent ink. In a press conference after the polls closed, Aoun said his party recorded several violations, including "shortcomings by official institutions and registrar committees, a shortage in staff, and tardiness of judges."

ARMY CONTAINED
SPORADIC CLASHES

¶13. (SBU) Local news reported sporadic clashes in several areas, including in Sidon between Future Movement supporters and candidate Oussama Saad's followers; in Metn between Armenians and in Zahle between Hizballah and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), which caused some voters to leave the polling station. Local news reported that Hizballah members were preventing Christian voters from voting in Zahle by blocking the roads with tires.

¶14. (SBU) Local news reported that the LAF intervened in a scuffle between registrars in Rachaya, temporarily halting voting for 30 minutes. The Internal Security Forces (ISF) reported that several Amal Movement members broke into Future's party office in Clemenceau and started shooting; no reported injuries.

LAHOOD OBSERVED TEN
POLLING STATIONS

¶15. (SBU) Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood visited ten polling stations in a range of districts in Beirut and north and east of the capital. He also met with President Sleiman (septel).
SISON